

By: Representatives Bell (21st), McLean,
Anthony

To: Workforce Development

HOUSE BILL NO. 1556

1 AN ACT TO CREATE THE MISSISSIPPI CAREER AND TECHNICAL
2 EDUCATION EMPLOYABILITY (MISSCATEE) PROGRAM, WHICH SHALL BE
3 DIRECTED BY THE OFFICE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE PURPOSE OF
4 PROVIDING TUITION-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE ATTENDANCE FOR ELIGIBLE
5 RECIPIENTS FOR CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) AND TRAINING
6 LEADING TO ASSOCIATE DEGREE CREDENTIALS OR INDUSTRY CERTIFICATIONS
7 IN HIGH-WAGE, HIGH-DEMAND INDUSTRIES WITH DOCUMENTED WORKFORCE
8 SHORTAGES PRIORITIZED BY THE OFFICE; TO PROVIDE FOR DEFINITIONS;
9 TO PROVIDE THAT THE OFFICE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (ACCELERATE
10 MS) SHALL SERVE AS FISCAL AGENT IN ADMINISTERING THE FUNDS; TO
11 PRESCRIBE THE REQUIREMENTS TO ESTABLISH ELIGIBILITY AND TO REMAIN
12 ELIGIBLE FOR THE RECEIPT OF PROGRAM FUNDS; TO PROVIDE THAT THE
13 RECIPIENT OF A GRANT SHALL COMMIT TO SERVING IN THE INDUSTRY
14 SECTOR FOR WHICH HIS DEGREE CREDENTIAL OR INDUSTRY CERTIFICATION
15 WAS GRANTED FOR SUCH A PERIOD OF TIME IN THE STATE AS DETERMINED
16 BY THE OFFICE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT; TO PROVIDE THE REPORTING
17 REQUIREMENTS; TO PROVIDE FOR THE RECOUPING OF FUNDS BY THE OFFICER
18 OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FROM ANY RECIPIENT WHO FAILS TO ADHERE TO
19 HIS OR HER AGREEMENT REGARDING COMPLETION OF THE PROGRAM OR WORK
20 AND RESIDENCY COMMITMENT; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

21 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

22 **SECTION 1.** This act shall be known and cited as the
23 "Mississippi Connecting Career and Technical Education
24 Employability (MissCATEE) Program."

25 **SECTION 2.** (1) The Legislature finds that establishing
26 attainable workforce goals reflect Mississippi's commitment to
27 creating a pipeline of skilled workers to address workforce



28 shortages and build a sustainable economic future begins with
29 investing in career and technical education (CTE) programs that
30 meet the needs of employers and communities. Mississippi's
31 workforce development goals center around equipping its citizens
32 with the skills necessary to meet the demands of high-growth,
33 high-demand industries. These goals, include the following:

34 (a) Expanded career and technical education (CTE)
35 opportunities, which:

36 (i) Increase access to CTE programs at community
37 colleges to prepare students for technical and skilled trade
38 careers;

39 (ii) Focus on industry-recognized certifications
40 and associate degrees aligned with state workforce needs; and

41 (iii) Promote dual-enrollment opportunities for
42 high school students to participate in CTE pathways;

43 (b) Align education and training with emphasis on
44 Mississippi's workforce development sector strategies or priority
45 occupations, as identified by Accelerate MS, targeting industries
46 with workforce shortages. High-priority sectors include:

47 (i) Advanced manufacturing: addressing the
48 growing need for skilled machinists, engineers and technicians;

49 (ii) Healthcare: expanding the pipeline for
50 nurses, allied health professionals and paramedics;

51 (iii) Information technology: preparing workers
52 for roles in cybersecurity, software development and IT support;



53 (iv) Transportation and logistics: training
54 workers for commercial driving, warehousing and supply chain
55 management; and

56 (v) Energy and construction: focusing on renewable
57 energy technologies, traditional utilities and skilled trades like
58 electricians and plumbers;

59 (c) Address workforce shortages in rural areas to:

60 (i) Prioritize investments in CTE programs to
61 serve underserved rural communities where skilled labor gaps are
62 most acute; and

63 (ii) Develop programs to retain graduates within
64 the state, with special incentives for those who commit to working
65 in rural areas;

66 (d) Promote lifelong learning and upskilling that:

67 (i) Encourage adults aged eighteen (18) and older
68 to re-enter the workforce or enhance their skills through CTE
69 programs; and

70 (ii) Provide pathways for individuals without
71 postsecondary education to earn certifications or degrees,
72 fostering upward economic mobility;

73 (e) Support economic resilience through public-private
74 partnerships by:

75 (i) Collaborating with industries to identify
76 workforce needs and design CTE curricula that address specific
77 skill gaps; and



78 (ii) Incentivizing employers to participate in
79 apprenticeship programs, internships and on-the-job training for
80 students;

81 (f) Increase access to funding and support services
82 that:

83 (i) Offer financial aid programs, like
84 tuition-free grants or scholarships, to eliminate barriers to CTE
85 participation; and

86 (ii) Provide wraparound support services such as
87 childcare, transportation and academic counseling to ensure
88 student success; and

89 (g) Focus on data-driven workforce solutions that:

90 (i) Use labor market data to identify emerging
91 industries and predict workforce needs; and

92 (ii) Regularly update sector strategies or
93 priority occupations, as identified by Accelerate MS, and CTE
94 offerings to reflect changes in Mississippi's economic landscape.

95 (2) Therefore, the intent of the Legislature is:

96 (a) To provide funding to the Office of Workforce
97 Development to establish a scholarship program for the purposes
98 outlined herein.

99 (b) To provide tuition-free access to community
100 colleges with accredited CTE programs that are aligned with
101 Mississippi's workforce sector strategies or priority occupations,
102 as identified by Accelerate MS, which result in a degree



103 credential or industry certification in an identified industry
104 sector, ensuring a pipeline of skilled workers to meet the state's
105 economic demands.

106 (c) To gauge the effectiveness of this program by
107 gathering data related to the participation and employment
108 outcomes in order to replicate successful efforts in future
109 workforce development programs.

110 **SECTION 3.** (1) There is established the Mississippi
111 Connecting Career and Technical Education Employability
112 (MissCATEE) Program, which shall be directed by the Office of
113 Workforce Development (Accelerate MS) for the purpose of providing
114 tuition-free community college attendance for eligible recipients
115 for career and technical education (CTE) and training for
116 associate degree credential or industry certification in
117 high-wage, high-demand industries with documented workforce
118 shortages prioritized by the office. This program shall be
119 subject to the availability of funds appropriated by the
120 Legislature.

121 (2) As used in this section, the following words and phrases
122 shall have the meanings as defined herein unless the context
123 clearly indicates otherwise:

124 (a) "Accelerate MS" or "office" means the Office of
125 Workforce Development.



126 (b) "Eligible institution" means any community college,
127 local workforce development area or other eligible recipient of
128 funding under this section.

129 (c) "Eligible program" means a career and technical
130 (CTE) program administered at an eligible institution and approved
131 by the Office of Workforce Development (Accelerate MS), which is
132 aligned with identified workforce sector strategies or priority
133 occupations, and identified on the state's Eligible Training
134 Provider List (ETPL).

135 (d) "Eligible recipient" means a person who:

136 (i) Has been a resident of Mississippi for at
137 least one (1) year prior to enrollment in an eligible program at
138 an eligible institution and continues to physically reside herein;

139 (ii) Is a United States citizen, lawful permanent
140 resident, or noncitizen eligible under Title IV regulations for
141 student aid eligibility;

142 (iii) Has a high school diploma, GED or
143 equivalent;

144 (iv) Is enrolled in an eligible CTE program at a
145 Mississippi community college or dually-enrolled in an eligible
146 CTE program through his or her high school in accordance with
147 Section 37-15-38;

148 (v) Has completed a Free Application for Federal
149 Student Aid (FAFSA);



150 (vi) Maintains satisfactory academic progress as
151 defined by the administering institution upon enrollment;

152 (vii) Has not previously earned an associate or
153 bachelor's degree; and

154 (viii) Agrees to remain in the State of
155 Mississippi and work in the industry sector in which the degree
156 credential or industry certification was earned for such a period
157 of time as prescribed by policies promulgated by the Office of
158 Workforce Development for each identified sector strategy or
159 priority occupation.

160 (e) "High-wage, high-demand industry" means those
161 industries paying above Mississippi's median annual income and
162 prioritized by the office across the eight (8) workforce
163 ecosystems.

164 (f) "Sector strategy" means the workforce
165 needs of an industry within a regional labor market that has been
166 collaboratively identified by a partnership of employers within a
167 critical industry that brings together education, economic
168 development, workforce systems and community organizations to
169 collaboratively provide job-readiness training (including
170 professional skills development), occupational skills training and
171 support services.

172 (3) The Office of Workforce Development shall serve as
173 fiscal agent in administering the funds, and shall disburse
174 appropriate funds to eligible institutions on a semester basis



175 upon receipt of verification of eligible recipients' enrollment in
176 an eligible program.

177 (4) Subject to appropriation by the Legislature, allocations
178 to eligible recipients shall be awarded to the eligible
179 institution of enrollment by the office through an application
180 process.

181 (5) The office shall:

182 (a) Inform each recipient of the amount his or her
183 portion of the program funds available for use, dependent on
184 enrollment as a full-time or part-time student; and

185 (b) Develop regulations and procedures to govern the
186 administration of the program.

187 (7) The office may use a minimal amount of funds allocated
188 for this section for the administration of the program, to be
189 approved by the State Workforce Investment Board Executive
190 Committee.

191 **SECTION 4.** (1) The district office of each Local Workforce
192 Development Area shall enter into a contract agreement with each
193 eligible recipient of funds under the program employing existing
194 processes for certifying participants, provided that such
195 agreement incorporates the following obligations and conditions:

196 (a) The recipient of funds shall commit to working in
197 the industry sector which correlates to his or her earned degree
198 credential or industry certification within the State of
199 Mississippi such a period of time as prescribed by policies



200 promulgated by the Office of Workforce Development for each sector
201 strategy and priority occupation;

202 (b) If any recipient of program funds does not engage
203 in working in the industry sector which correlates to his or her
204 earned degree credential or industry certification in accordance
205 with the terms of this act, the recipient shall be obligated to
206 repay all amounts received, together with interest thereon at the
207 maximum rate allowed by Mississippi law or the federal discount
208 rate plus five percent (5%) per year, whichever is less, the
209 interest to accrue from the date that each payment of funds was
210 received by the recipient;

211 (c) No interest shall accrue and there shall be no
212 obligation to repay the principal sums accrued during any one (1)
213 period of time that the recipient involuntarily serves on active
214 duty in the United States Armed Forces; and

215 (d) Repayment of the principal with interest shall be
216 due and payable in full immediately on the occurrence of either of
217 the following events:

218 (i) Failure to remain in the State of Mississippi
219 for such a period of time as prescribed by policies promulgated by
220 the Office of Workforce Development for each identified sector
221 strategy or priority occupation for any reason other than
222 temporary personal illness; or

223 (ii) Failure to work in the industry sector which
224 correlates to his or her earned degree credential or industry



225 certification on a regularly sustained basis as provided in the
226 eligibility requirements of Section 3 of this act.

227 (2) The Office of Workforce Development shall establish the
228 priorities and provide such directives along with the necessary
229 funds to the Local Workforce Development Areas, which shall
230 administer the distribution of these funds. Of the funds
231 appropriated under the provisions of this act, the office shall
232 allocate no less than three percent (3%) and no more than five
233 percent (5%) to the Local Workforce Development Areas for the
234 administration of these provisions.

235 (3) In recouping the funds from individuals who fail to
236 fulfill their obligated requirements under the program, Accelerate
237 MS shall annually provide a list of eligible programs based on
238 priority sectors and occupations and program recipients to the
239 Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board, which shall
240 collect such funds based on the determination of breach. The
241 board shall collaborate with Accelerate MS to track fund
242 recipients under the program through the requisite time prescribed
243 by the Office of Workforce Development for each identified sector
244 strategy and priority occupation.

245 **SECTION 5.** The Office of Workforce Development shall submit
246 an annual report on the program to the Governor, the Lieutenant
247 Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chair
248 of the House Workforce Development Committee, the Chair of the
249 Senate Economic and Workforce Development Committee and the



250 Chairperson of the House and Senate Universities and Colleges
251 Committees. The report shall contain a detailed explanation of
252 how the funds appropriated for the program were awarded and how
253 many students have participated in the grant program and their
254 employment outcomes.

255 **SECTION 6.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
256 and after July 1, 2025.

